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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0674

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 000272

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR WALLER, LONDON FOR TSOU;
DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, DRL/JOSEPH BARGHOUT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: FOR AILING RIAD SEIF, RIAD AL-TURK AND DAMASCUS
DECLARATION CONTEMPLATE FULL COURT PRESS

REF: A. 07 DAMASCUS 01106
[B](#). 08 DAMASCUS 00757
[C](#). DAMASCUS 00148

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Three members of the Damascus Declaration Secretariat General met with PolEconoffs on April 6 to register their concern over Riad Seif's declining health (ref A). Seif, one of the most prominent leaders in the Damascus Declaration movement and a cancer patient, is currently serving a two-year prison sentence. The three men reported the Damascus Declaration community was consulting Seif's family on whether to initiate an international campaign seeking Seif's release on humanitarian grounds. End Summary.

[2](#). (C) Riad al-Turk (who spent 20 years in prison, most of it in solitary confinement), Amin Obeidi, and Sheikh Nawaf al-Bashir (strictly protect all) met with PolEconoffs on April 6 for a wide-ranging discussion on civil society issues. This cable reports on their remarks regarding Seif's deteriorating health. The three men are part of the Damascus Declaration's five-person Secretariat General Head Office. The other two members, Riad Seif and Ali al-Abdallah, were sentenced to two and a half years in prison this past October (ref B).

SEIF'S HEALTH IN DECLINE

[3](#). (C) The three men reported that Riad Seif's had been suffering severe pain for the past two weeks. Seif's most recent blood test, the results of which were provided to Seif on April 5, showed increased cancer indicators, according to Turk. Seif, who suffers from prostate cancer, had undergone emergency surgery in January and, according to Bashir, his surgeon claimed to have removed all cancerous cells. Based on the new blood work, however, Seif's surgeon feared the cancer had metastasized, Bashir reported.

ACTIVISTS CONSIDER INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

[4](#). (C) Based on this new information, Turk said, the Damascus Declaration was poised to launch an international campaign for Seif's release for humanitarian reasons. Before taking any action, however, the three men were seeking consensus among other members on this issue and were consulting closely with the prisoner's families, especially his daughter, Jumana

Seif (strictly protect), to weigh the pros and cons of raising an isolated case. Turk said that if they were to go forward with the offensive, they hoped the U.S. would support their effort in the form of a public statement from the State Department and/or the White House.

15. (C) While adhering as a general principle to Damascus Declaration solidarity, Seif and his family have until now also resisted the one apparent path to release offered by the SARG. During a February 21 dinner, visiting Senator John Kerry raised Seif's health with President Bashar al-Asad. Asad told Kerry that Seif had been informed that if he were to send an appeal to Asad, Asad would consider humanitarian release. The problem for Seif, as Kerry told the Charge, is that Seif would have to acknowledge guilt in the charges on which he was convicted.

16. (S) Should the Damascus Declaration begin a public push for Seif's release on medical grounds, Post believes consideration of a USG statement would be warranted. We are cognizant, however, that a high-level statement focused on Seif alone may box in the SARG and prove counterproductive to the short-term goal of gaining Seif's release and the long-term goal of freeing all prisoners of conscience. With this concern in mind, we propose that, should the Damascus Declaration make a public appeal on humanitarian grounds, the Department--at whatever level it deems appropriate--should publicly support that appeal on the same grounds.

17. (S) Post will follow up with Damascus Declaration National Council and other contacts to confirm Seif's condition and

DAMASCUS 00000272 002 OF 002

his family's recommendations.
CONNELLY